

## Good first festival

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Well, the first "Highlands Festival" has come and gone.

And by all accounts, it was pretty successful, especially given that this was the first outing.

Put together by the Highlands Coalition, it was held at the scenic Waterloo Village in Byram Township.

It actually straddles Stanhope, Byram and Mount Olive, and we've written regularly over the years about the plight to keep it up and running.

It's a state park now, and has been largely dormant for the past half dozen years or so. And it kind of showed. The buildings are in slight states of disrepair. But all in all, it was tranquil, peaceful and an ideal setting to celebrate all things that the 80-member Highlands Coalition stands for. The Highlands legislation was about limiting development, protecting natural water and land resources and, in short, preserving the future.

We remember one wise Roxbury mayor saying once "No one really knows just how much water is really down there." And the whole idea of "Highlands" preservation is about protecting valuable, but likely limited, natural resources.

Anyway, the festival was fun. But in a laid back, getting back to nature, kind of way. No carnival rides. No noisy cars or motorcycles. Instead, a peaceful gathering with some impressive varieties of music set in a tranquil, natural enclave of the Highlands region.

Is there room for improvement? Certainly. Lots more vendors and tables would be likely in years to come. More food types and possibly a well-known musical act or entertainer would make things appeal to a broader crowd.

But, those are all things associated with growing an event.

This was the first year, and for the first year, the Highlands Coalition did a great job.

Of particular interest were the environmental groups and organizations. The one we're most familiar with is the Roxbury Environmental Action Coalition (R.E.A.C.T.), formed in neighboring Roxbury to fight the current problems associated with the Fenimore landfill on Mooney Mountain.

But, even if you're not there to hear about the latest cause or movement, the setting was superb. One young lady told us she couldn't wait to get through the gates and onto the Waterloo Village property again.

The buildings and grounds need some work, but they weren't too bad. In fact, it was all kind of quaint and peaceful. It really took you back to a simpler time. Who doesn't remember their class trip to Waterloo Village? And many we talked to on Saturday (it was held Sunday too) recalled the village's golden era a decade or more ago, when "big names" in the music business graced the stages.

The main stage was nicely done. It was large, and the lawn in front of it was picturesque. It rained Saturday night, but one can easily see the whole field filled with music lovers and their children, enjoying a night in the great outdoors, under the stars, beneath the autumn sky.

In a word, scenic. In another, picturesque.

The coalition did a nice job for its freshman effort. We look forward to seeing this event grow and improve in the coming years. It was well worth a family outing. And we would never recommend finding another venue; the village was perfect.

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